



Belize Tourism Industry Association





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The voice for private sector tourism in paradise

Beautiful Belize. A destination akin to paradise. And a hands-down favorite getaway location for business travelers and pleasure seekers, alike. Three decades ago, when the Belize Tourism Industry Association was created, the tourist industry was in its infancy on the island. Today, with the burgeoning growth and success of all manner of tourism-related enterprises in the region, never-before seen challenges are arising... and the BTIA is one busy and dedicated entity.

In the early 1980s, a group of forward-thinking indi-

viduals saw the huge potential of the tourism industry, and realized the need for a united voice for the private sector. Led by Mrs. Jean Shaw, the group formed the Belize Tourism Industry Association, which was incorporated under the laws of Belize in 1989, and is now one of the country's largest non-profit organizations.

Executive Director, John Burgos, is responsible for the overall supervision of the BTIA National Secretariat by coordinating and implementing policies and procedures in Governance, Administration, Revenue Gener-



AT A GLANCE

WHO: Belize Tourism Industry Association

WHAT: Non-profit organization representing the Belize tourism industry

WHERE: National Office in Belize City, Belize

WEBSITE: www.btia.org

ation, Membership Outreach and Development, Communication and Marketing, Lobbying, and Advocacy. Burgos knows the Association inside-out, and gives some interesting insight on the back story:

“In the ‘80s, there was no Ministry of Tourism, no Belize Tourism Board. The main industries at the time were sugar cane, citrus, and banana exports. Tourism was nowhere on the government roster, so a group of individuals established the Belize Tourism Industry Association to be a much-needed voice for hotel owners,





providers of guided fishing tours, trips to the Blue Hole, the Reef... everyone offering services to tourists.”

Officially, “the BTIA is an umbrella organization for the tourism industry’s private sector with a mandate to advocate on behalf of its members for the benefit of the tourism industry by influencing the outcomes of public policy and resource allocation decisions by the government, specifically for tourism.” Today, the Association has representation on almost every government, legislative, advisory, consultative, and licensing committee. As a direct result of BTIA’s advocacy efforts, tourism is front and center on the list of government priorities.

Member perks

BTIA membership numbers have climbed to 600, covering six categories – three each for Personal and Business members. Burgos notes, “Membership is open to any stakeholder in the tourism industry. Hotel and resort owners, tour operators, tour guides - we even have chocolate companies and artisans that develop souvenirs. Also, any student studying tourism can become a member.”

Benefits well exceed the annual membership fee. They include generous discounts on training, voting at the

AGM, and marketing opportunities such as website listings and reduced advertising rates. In addition, member-to-member discounts from tourism-related companies throughout Belize are especially attractive.

The value of advocacy on behalf of members is priceless. According to Burgos, “We advocate directly for our members on issues that the government sees as important to promoting tourism. Anything that is going to contradict us in any way, we stand up side-by-side with the government to decide the best way forward.” One such issue is the sustainable development of local infrastructure; something the tourism sector touts as crucial to future growth.

The Association is led by a membership-elected Board of Directors that represents all ten BTIA chapters, one from each district, country-wide. Board members elect their own President, who sits for two years. The Secretariat, under Executive Director Burgos, has a permanent staff of three (Event & Marketing Manager, Membership Officer, and Accountant).

Do you have an app for that?

Tourism is currently the country’s number one sector in terms of revenue generation and employment. Over-







night accommodation numbers have seen increases of 15 to 22 percent monthly from January to July of 2016. The majority of visitors still come from Canada and the US, but European and South American markets are coming on board. Consistent growth is predicted for the future, as more travelers are lured by expanded marketing initiatives to choose Belize as their go-to destination.

BTIA continues to develop projects based on market trends, globalization, and membership needs. One key event is the Belize Tourism Expo (BETEX) that takes place every two years. The upcoming show in May 2017 promises to be the best yet. Burgos says, “We bring travel agents from all over the world to meet with our local tour operators and service providers over a three-day period. This is the only event of its kind in Belize, and reinforces the purpose of the Association to support and provide networking opportunities for our members.”

“Destination Belize” is a signature magazine produced by BTIA, and the only publication featuring a full perspective of the country. Print copies are distributed worldwide through Belize diplomatic offices, and by BTIA Board Members attending international travel and road shows. The Belize Hotel Association assists with national distribution, while BTIA members ensure

the magazine is available at every hotel in the country.

“This year, for the first time, we are expanding the Destination Belize marketing platform to promote Belize globally,” says Burgos. “We are producing an electronic version, available by app, as well as a dedicated website just for the magazine. The key factor is to make it accessible to everyone. Keyword-coded technology will make downloading easy and accessible from anywhere.”

BTIA is thrilled to announce that this is the first app to promote Belize as a tourist destination. The official launch of the new website and the online ‘e-book’ edition of Destination Belize is slated for October 3, 2016.

Open for business!

Belize is a tropical treasure whose time has come. And BTIA is working tirelessly to spread the word. Affiliations with other private sector tourism entities – locally, regionally, and internationally – allow sharing of knowledge and experience. Burgos adds, “We can be beneficial to other countries in similar positions on how to challenge the system and be successful. Anyone interested in visiting or doing business in Belize, feel free to contact BTIA and we can easily align them with our members, based on the needs and services they require.”

www.btia.org